

Executive Summary

Title: Culture and the Military in the Middle East: The Case of Kuwait

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Thesis: This paper will show that cultural factors, and the political context of Kuwait's National Strategy, negatively impact Kuwait's military effectiveness. Furthermore, American military advisors need to understand these factors in order to avoid professional frustration and to be more effective in their mission.

Discussion: Kuwait is one of the United States' most critical allies in the volatile Arabian Gulf region. Despite this close relationship and the robust military-to-military contacts, there is very little detailed understanding of how and why the Kuwait Armed Forces operates the way it does. Most American advisors to the Kuwait Armed Forces arrive under-prepared to deal effectively with their host nation because of a general misunderstanding of the significant role that culture plays on their military effectiveness. Arab, Islamic, and Kuwaiti culture affect the Kuwait Armed Forces just as they affect Kuwaiti civil society in general. Although many cultural factors impact their military effectiveness, this paper focuses on Arab identity, the influence of the family, tribalism, personal relationships, Islam, modernization, and wealth. In addition, the Government of Kuwait has decided to pursue its national security through a series of international defense arrangements, which also hamper the development of military effectiveness. In order to gain a full appreciation of the capabilities, limitations, and potential of the Kuwait Armed Forces, it is essential to examine both the impact of cultural factors on the individual and collective identities of Kuwaiti soldiers, as well as how Kuwait's political context limits the Kuwait Armed Forces ability to reform itself.

Conclusion: Cultural factors have a major negative impact on the Kuwait Armed Forces because they shape the stratification of Kuwaiti society, they value group loyalty over individual responsibility, and they rely on family ties and hierarchy rather than impersonal organizations to define social interaction. These factors take on even greater significance when they are considered in addition to the impact of the multiple regional and international security arrangements, which are the basis for Kuwait's national security. Security arrangements remove the primary motive for developing a credible organic defense, which is the requirement for their Armed Forces to ensure their own external security. The tight grip that the ruling family maintains on national security policy also limits the development of Kuwait's military effectiveness by limiting the debate about the need for positive change. Very little rapid change is likely to occur in

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 2005		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2005 to 00-00-2005	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Culture and the Military in the Middle East: The Case of Kuwait				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) United States Marine Corps, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps Combat Development, Marine Corps University, 2076 South Street, Quantico, VA, 22134-5068				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 62	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

the development of military professionalism of the Kuwait Armed Forces until fundamental changes in Kuwaiti society and politics force the change. Until that occurs, American advisors need to carefully study the environment and learn how to effectively cope in a military environment that is so radically different from their own.

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Preface

Understanding foreign cultures and languages has found a new and urgent priority in the Department of Defense born of the American experiences in The War on Terrorism. This study is intended to familiarize the reader with the culture of a key Arab ally and to encourage the reader to consider the importance of cultural and language study to military operations. Many of the observations and conclusions in this paper have, to greater or lesser degree, relevance to Kuwait's neighbors and are offered in the spirit of cooperation as further military operations are planned and executed in the Middle East. Cultural understanding and language proficiency are by no means solutions to the complex dilemmas posed by counterinsurgency warfare, but they do offer an excellent starting point for both the planning and conduct of military operations on all "three-blocks" of the war.

I am grateful to Ambassador Richard Jones for the time he took from his busy schedule to talk to me about Kuwait and Iraq. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance provided by the officers of the Office of Military Cooperation, Kuwait, including Brigadier General Thomas Mulholland, USA; Maj Mark Mackey, USMC; and MAJ Frank Virgadamo, USAF who assisted in my research. I would like to thank Lieutenant Colonel Tony Schumacher of the King's Own Border Regiment, British Army and Lieutenant Colonel John Haynes, USA both were invaluable sounding boards and helped shape many of my observations. I am also indebted to Major Phillip Whitehead of the Royal Highland Fusiliers, British Army for his friendship and his example of how to be a good advisor.

“The beginning and ending of the secret of handling Arabs is unremitting study of them. Keep always on your guard; never say an unnecessary thing: watch yourself and your companions all the time: hear all that passes, search out what is going on beneath the surface, read their characters, discover their tastes and their weaknesses and keep everything you find out to yourself. Bury yourself in Arab circles, have no interests and no ideas except the work in hand, so that your brain is saturated with one thing only, and you realize your part deeply enough to avoid the little slips that would counteract the painful work of weeks. Your success will be proportioned to the amount of mental effort you devote to it.”¹

Colonel T.E. Lawrence, 20 August 1917

Introduction

Kuwait is one of the United States’ most critical allies in the Arabian Gulf.² The special relationship between Kuwait and the United States predates the 1990 Iraqi invasion, but that experience transformed the relationship into one characterized by a profound connection between the people and government of Kuwait and of the United States. The support that Kuwait has shown to the United States in the War on Terror and in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) is a reflection of the nature of the special relationship. Kuwait is a transportation hub for American forces in the region, is a significant pre-positioning site, hosts several critical bilateral military exercises, and has one of the largest Security Assistance Organizations in the Department of Defense.³ Yet, despite the high levels of military-to-military contact with the Kuwait Army there is generally very little cultural understanding between our forces and very little written about the military culture of one of our key regional allies⁴.

¹ T.E. Lawrence, “Twenty-Seven Articles,” The Arab Bulletin, 17 August 1917. [Online] <http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1917/27arts.html>

² I have chosen, for this paper, to call this body of water the Arabian Gulf because that is the common naming convention that Kuwait uses. The Arabian Gulf may also be referred to as the Persian Gulf.

³ A Security Assistance Organization (SAO) is the military element of a US Embassy Country Team that assists other nations to preserve their national security through grant and sales programs of military equipment and training, as well as by providing military advice and defense cooperation. The Department of State (DOS) is the program manager for security assistance, while the Department of Defense (DOD) implements the program. The SAO is a key element in the Regional Combatant Commander’s Theater Engagement Plan (TEP).

⁴ The Kuwait Army refers to all of the armed forces under the control of the Minister of Defense. The Kuwait Army is the Headquarters of the force, which includes the Land Force, Naval Force, Air Force, Commando Brigade, Emiri Guard, and Reserve Brigade. The Kuwait National Guard answers to the President of the National Guard through the Supreme Council for Defense, and is therefore not considered in this work.

This paper will show that cultural factors, and the political context of Kuwait's National Strategy, have an impact on its military effectiveness, and that American military advisors need to understand these factors in order to avoid professional frustration and to be more effective in their mission. After an analysis of the most important cultural factors, I will examine the Kuwait Army's effectiveness drawing on my personal experience as an advisor to the Kuwait Land Force (KLF).⁵ Discussion about Kuwait's political context will be addressed in order to demonstrate how politics directly affects their military effectiveness. Although the specific performance of the Kuwait Armed Forces is important, it is secondary to gaining an appreciation of the cultural and political environment, which provides the best framework against which to assess both their performance and their potential.

What is the Relevance of This Paper?

Before beginning a review of the Kuwait Army, it is important to provide the reader a brief explanation of why this subject is significant and to show its relevance. My initial contacts with an Arab military came during a MEU(SOC) deployment in 2000 while I was serving as a rifle company commander. My contacts, while generally positive, were marked by frustration and perhaps a measure of condescension about the Arab militaries capabilities' and effectiveness.⁶ I knew next-to-nothing about Arab culture and the Arab militaries that I was being exposed to. I returned to the Arabian Gulf region two years after my initial experience to serve as the Operations Advisor to the Kuwait Land Force as a part of the Office of Military Cooperation, Kuwait (OMC-K). I spent two years immersed in the military and civilian culture of Kuwait, and was able to observe the Kuwaitis from something of a special perspective. As an

⁵ The Kuwait Army has two major military advisory elements: The American Office of Military Cooperation, Kuwait (OMC-K) and the British Military Mission (BMM).

⁶ My initial military contacts were with the United Arab Emirates Army and Kuwait Land Force during military exercises, and the Armed Forces and Police of Yemen during security operations after the bombing of the USS COLE on October 12, 2000.

advisor during the build-up and conduct of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF), I was also able to witness thousands of interactions between American advisors and military units with various elements of the Kuwait Army and civilian population. I was profoundly disturbed by the lack of understanding that many Americans displayed in their dealings with the Kuwaitis.

My intent is to study a critical ally in order to foster a better understanding of Kuwaiti culture, which will enable other Americans to work more effectively with the Kuwaitis. I believe a deeper understanding of Kuwaiti history and culture will assist the United States in developing Kuwait's military potential and will help to strengthen the overall military-to-military relationship. Culturally, Kuwaitis are very different from Americans, which makes the study of Kuwaiti culture a critical component of developing an effective approach to working with and advising the Kuwait Armed Forces. Further, I was able to travel to several Arabian Gulf States during my tour and I observed the deployment and operations of the Peninsula Shield Force of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) during the build-up prior to OIF, both of which reinforce my perceptions of the many significant similarities between Kuwait and the other Gulf States.⁷

Kuwait's Geostrategic Importance

There are several factors that contribute to making a study of Kuwait relevant to the US defense community, including its geostrategic importance, military operational importance, and historic ties to the West. The interplay of Kuwait's geography and immense natural resources combine to make it very important to the United States. Kuwaiti historian Hasan Ali al-Ebraheem's observation that, "Kuwait is a small state living in a bad neighborhood," understates

⁷ The Peninsula Shield Force was a Division (Minus) commanded by a Saudi Arabian Major General and made up of a Saudi Mechanized Brigade (Reinforced), a United Arab Emirates mechanized battalion and artillery battalion, an Omani battalion (Minus), a Bahraini company, and a Qatari contingent. Peninsula Shield was deployed in a defensive sector in Western Kuwait to assist the Kuwait Armed Forces in securing their border prior to the Coalition invasion of Iraq.

the potential threats to Kuwait's security, and even to its very existence.⁸ Its small size, lack of strategic depth, and position between Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia have always constituted a threat to Kuwait and has contributed to its decision making, especially in regards to its national security and defense policies. Several of the most pressing geostrategic threats to Kuwait include the increasing instability in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia due to Islamic extremism, the insurgency in Iraq, unresolved border disputes with each of its larger neighbors, the potential for destabilizing domestic threats, and continued reliance on Western powers for its defense.

Kuwait's Military Significance to the United States

To even the casual observer, Kuwait's importance to the United States military is apparent. Upon its liberation from Iraq in 1991, the Government of Kuwait entered into its first ten-year Defense Security Cooperation Agreement with the United States, which resulted in the expansion of American military pre-positioned stocks in Kuwait, increased basing facilities for US forces, and the creation of a series of joint military exercises, all of which were largely funded by Kuwait.⁹ The close association and frequent military-to-military contacts have also provided American forces with an effective cultural training ground; few Arab states are as open to the American military as is Kuwait. It is also important to note that Kuwait has entered into a similar arrangement with the United Kingdom: "The UK/Kuwait Memorandum of Understanding, signed in February 1992."¹⁰

⁸ Tetreault, Mary Ann, Stories of Democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), <http://www.ciaonet.org/book/tetreault/ch06.html>

⁹ The Defense Security Cooperation Agreement DSCA resulted in the permanent stationing of one US Army battalion task force in an expeditionary camp in Kuwait and the pre-positioning of one full set of equipment for a mechanized brigade. The DSCA was expanded to cover much of the buildup for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. The DSCA further established the biennial Exercise LUCKY SENTINEL, which enabled CENTCOM to rehearse the plan for the defense of Kuwait, and Exercises NATIVE FURY and NATIVE ATLAS, which opened Kuwait up to prepositioning exercises for the US Army and Marine Corps, respectively.

¹⁰ From the website of the British Embassy in Kuwait, online at URL: <http://www.britishembassy.gov.uk>

Kuwait's Unique Historical Ties to the West

Kuwait has a long tradition of close defense ties to the West stemming from the 1841 Anglo-Kuwaiti Maritime Truce. Although Kuwait's primary defense partner was the United Kingdom for over one hundred years, the United States has fulfilled that role since the early 1970's.¹¹ President Carter's 1980 State of the Union Address specifically stated that an assault on, "the Persian Gulf Region will be considered as an assault on vital interests of the United States, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary including military force."¹² This declaration by the President also came with major defense funding increases and efforts to ensure naval and air facilities in the region.¹³ The United States' first major military support to Kuwait came in 1987 during the Reagan Administration, when to protect the flow of oil from Iranian attacks, the United States reflagged Kuwaiti oil tankers in an operation designed to ensure the free passage of resources through the Straits of Hormuz.¹⁴ The United States' unmistakable support for Kuwait in the wake of the Iraqi invasion of 1990 further demonstrated the United States' unequivocal commitment to the region in general, and to Kuwait in particular.

Historical Context: Pre-Oil

Kuwait's history has been characterized for over 200 years by a "power constellation...determined by an alliance of the Sabah dynasty, merchants, and tribal sheikhs."¹⁵ From Kuwait's early history these three groups have defined the political landscape. It is critical for the reader to understand that these basic divisions of Kuwaiti society continue to broadly define contemporary society and these divisions can be seen in the military.

¹¹ Bell, Randy B. Major, USMC, "Expansion of American Persian Gulf Policy By Three Presidents," Command and Staff College, 1990 [Online] <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1990/BRB.htm>

¹² Carter, Jimmy. 1980 State of the Union Address, 23 January 1980. [Online] <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/speeches/su80jec.phtml>

¹³ Carter

¹⁴ Bell

¹⁵ Paul Aarts, "Post-War Kuwait and the Process of Democratization: The Persistence of Political Tribalism", Change and Development in the Gulf, ed. Abbas Abdelkarim (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), 213.

In the days before the discovery of oil, the Sabah family and the merchant families relied on an arrangement which divided their responsibilities: the Sabah family controlled the government, political, and defense affairs, while the merchant families were able to largely control the economic and commercial interests of Kuwait. In those days, the merchant families were primarily involved in the date trade between Southern Iraq, India, and East Africa.¹⁶ The merchants would sometimes be away from Kuwait for more than a year at a time, which necessitated this type of symbiotic relationship. This power-sharing arrangement forged a unique and sometimes fractious relationship between the ruling Sabah dynasty and the merchant families. In order to maintain its grip on power in light of the growing wealth of the merchant families, the Sabah family has relied on the third leg of the “power constellation,” the tribes of Kuwait. The loyalty of these tribes was assured through liberal financial and social entitlements, a tradition which continues to largely describe political relationships today.¹⁷

Historical Context: Post-Oil

Oil was discovered in Kuwait in 1936 and oil exports began in 1946.¹⁸ The discovery of vast oil reserves in Kuwait marked a distinct turning point in the history of the State of Kuwait. Suddenly, Kuwait was amassing enormous financial resources and the Sabah family was able to find financial independence from the merchant families of Kuwait through nationalization of oil and land resources. In order to protect this wealth, Kuwait decided to limit the number of people

¹⁶ Richard Jones, Interview by Sean Riordan. October 15, 2004 at Harvard University

¹⁷ Immediately following the discovery of oil, the Government of Kuwait provided no-cost housing for thousands of tribal families. Later as populations increased, the policy was shifted to no-interest loans for all Kuwaiti citizens to allow them to purchase land and build their own homes. The Government of Kuwait continues to provide adequate government salaries and retirement, no-interest loans for homes and businesses, and monthly stipends for each full-Kuwaiti citizen child.

¹⁸ Aarts, 215

who would be eligible to receive benefits by restricting Kuwaiti citizenship. The initial requirement for citizenship required individuals to trace their origins in Kuwait to 1921.¹⁹

The second program, which is of particular importance to this study, was the massive naturalization program of 1967. The program in which, “select tribal groups were given low-income housing and jobs in the police and the army created thousands of new Kuwaiti citizens.”²⁰ This accomplished two important tasks for the Sabah Dynasty: it solidified parliamentary support and opened the government up to a wider pool of potential government employees to fill positions in the bureaucracy, military, and police.

Over time, this arrangement has continued to characterize Kuwaiti politics and the economic niches of each segment of society have remained relatively stable and autonomous. The Royal Sabah family continues to control national security policy and oil revenue as it directs the distribution of wealth through vast social benefits, which include the awarding of relatively high positions within the government, military, and police. These positions are generally highly paid and comfortable ones, but ones that fall below the policy-making level.

Historical Background of the Kuwait Armed Forces

The first organization charged with the defense of Kuwait was established in 1938, shortly after the discovery of oil, when “the first division of Public Security and Border Forces was established and this entity remained until 1953 when the Public Security Forces became the basis for the new Police Department and the Border Forces became the basis for the new Army.”²¹ The initial Kuwait Army remained extremely small and by the late-1950s numbered

¹⁹ Jones interview.

²⁰ Aarts, 216

²¹ Ghanim Al-Najjar, “Challenges of Security Sector Governance in Kuwait.” Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), Working Paper—No. 142 (Geneva: DCAF, 2004), 3.

just 2,000 personnel.²² The force fulfilled a number of traditional Army tasks such as border defense, but was temporarily merged in the late-1950s and early-1960s with the police. The dispute with Iraq over Kuwait's sovereignty dates to Kuwait's Independence in 1961 and the Iraqi General Kassem's subsequent claim to Kuwait. The tiny Kuwaiti Army was no match for its much more powerful neighbor, hence Kuwait opted to secure its independence through the first of what were to become many temporary security arrangements with outside powers, primarily the United Kingdom and later the United States.

Historical Context: The Invasion and Subsequent Liberation of Kuwait

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent liberation of Kuwait by Coalition Forces in 1991 produced numerous changes in Kuwaiti society that impact the present-day Kuwait Armed Forces. Initial Iraqi successes during the invasion, "proved the inability of the Kuwaiti regime to guarantee external security, which seriously undermined the government."²³ Neither the military-to-military relationship with the British, nor their Western combat equipment proved to be an adequate deterrent to Saddam Hussein. Foreign and Kuwaiti soldiers in the Kuwait Armed Forces quickly deserted their posts,²⁴ and the Kuwaiti leadership was forced to flee in order to survive. Iraq had effectively exploited a gap in Kuwait's National Security Strategy. Kuwait, which had always relied on external powers to provide a credible deterrent to its national defense, did not have such a credible deterrent in 1990. It was a lesson that the government would address after the liberation of Kuwait.

²² Al-Najjar. 4

²³ Aarts, 231

²⁴ This is a generalization used to highlight the overall failure of the Kuwait Armed Forces to prevent the invasion, and then to present a legitimate military defense of Kuwait when the invasion began. One good account of the tactical successes of the Kuwait Armed Forces can be read in Major Robert A. Nelson's article "The Battle of the Bridges: Kuwait's 35th Brigade on the 2nd of August, 1990" published in Armor Magazine, September-October 1995, Pp. 26-32

The liberation of Kuwaiti drew foreign policy and national security policy closer to the West out of necessity. The most visible signal of the Kuwaiti cooperation with the West, was the signing of the first of several ten-year defense agreements with the United States.²⁵ This Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) remains the bedrock of the US-Kuwait relationship and several subsequent agreements continuing the relationship have been signed. The DCA was also the foundation for another major rebuilding of the Kuwait Armed Forces through significant purchases of American military equipment and the arrival of advisors.

It is also important to understand that Kuwait signed similar “security arrangements protocols” with other nations such as Belarus, France, the Gulf Cooperation Council, Iran, Italy, China, South Africa, Russia, and United Kingdom.²⁶ The impact of these multiple arrangements on military effectiveness will be discussed in greater detail later in the paper.

Cultural Factors—The Kuwaiti National Character

For the purpose of this paper, culture is defined as:

The system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning. Culture is the sum of total of the learned behavior of a group of people that are generally considered to be the tradition of that people and are transmitted from generation to generation.²⁷

Many elements make up culture, and understanding those elements is a critical component of gaining a nuanced understanding of a people. For this study, I intend to focus on the Kuwaiti culture in specific, and then to extend, where reasonable, my conclusions to the other Gulf States. Although the specific cultures of the different Gulf States are unique, it is common

²⁵ www.countrystudies.us/persian-gulf-states/32.htm This ten-year defense agreement, called the Defense Cooperation Agreement, included \$81 million in American foreign military sales to Kuwait, it secured permission for American forces to pre-position weapons and personnel in Kuwait, and it established a program of bilateral military exercises in Kuwait, all at Kuwaiti expense.

²⁶ Al-Najjar. 7

²⁷ <http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/courses/122/module1/culture.html>

in sociologic and anthropologic writing to posit similar cultural characteristics to all Arabs. My examination of Arab culture will focus on Arab identity, the family, personal relationship dynamics, Islam, economics, modernization, and political participation. The goal of this segment of my research is to better understand the individual Kuwait military person through his own culture so we can begin to gain an appreciation about why the Kuwait Armed Forces operates in the way it does.

There are inherent risks involved in making generalizations about any group of people, and the observations here about the similarities of Arabs in general, and Kuwaitis in particular, do not in anyway exclude plurality and complexity. As with any culture, there are shared elements “that define the character and orientation of the people and affirm their common needs, interests, and goals with reference to joint action,”²⁸ just as there are differences.

Arab Identity

“The great majority of the citizens of Arab countries view themselves and are viewed by outsiders as Arabs. Their sense of Arab nationhood is based on what they have in common, namely language, culture, sociopolitical experiences, economic interest, and a collective memory of their place and role in history.”²⁹ Language is the strongest of these ties and is one of a number of elements that combines to give Arabs a sense of wider belonging. Arabic predates Islam and served to unify the Arabs before religion and national identification did. It is primarily from this factor that the concept of the supra national Arab nation comes.

One significant difficulty in applying this Arab identification to Kuwaitis is that the Kuwaitis also possess a keen sense of national identity. This sense of national identity is not,

²⁸ Halim Barakat. “Arab Identity: E Pluribus Unum”, from The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) [online] URL: http://arabworld.nitle.org/texts.php?module_id=6&reading_id=51

²⁹ Barakat, “Arab Identity: E Pluribus Unum”

however, more important than their Arab identity, but the two identities compete. One is likely to find that a Kuwaiti would identify himself inside Kuwait as first a Kuwaiti, then an Arab; while outside of Kuwait he would identify himself as first an Arab, and second as a Kuwaiti.

Because the self-image of many Arabs is intertwined with their language, it can be extremely difficult for non-Arabic speakers to deal effectively with them. My experience with the Kuwaitis reinforces that they are extremely conscious of their language as well as conscious of the outsider's desire and ability to speak Arabic. The Kuwaiti officers with whom I worked were very pleased to learn of my interest to learn, and attempts to speak, Arabic; many of them would refuse to use English with me in an attempt to teach me Arabic, even when this meant that work failed to get done. I observed several non-ethnic Arab, but Arabic-speaking contractors in their dealings with the Kuwait Land Force and was impressed at their apparent effectiveness.³⁰ Their language skills broke down traditional barriers, even in regards to English-speaking officers and the Kuwaitis would generally remark to me about their positive impression of the contractor.

In Kuwaiti society, the level of bilingualism rises in relation to the socio-economic position of the individual. English is offered from very young ages, and is normally compulsory in the private schools, but English is rarely offered and never mandatory in public education. English is also the language of commerce, so those families who intend their children to pursue careers in business are much more likely to ensure that their children study and speak English. The wealthiest Kuwaitis often send their children overseas for university-level education so that they can gain the necessary skills that will enable them to succeed in the business world. The two wealthy pillars of Kuwait's society, the Sabah family and the merchant families, have much

³⁰ These contractors were generally Russian technical advisors or contractors for the BMP-2, BMP-3, or SMERCH Multiple-Launch Rocket Systems.

higher levels of English proficiency than the tribal families. Bates and Rassam point out that this modern feature of life is not unique to Kuwait. They remark that “Although the educated elite in most countries of the Middle East is almost always bilingual in a European language, great emphasis is placed on the promotion of a national tongue among the masses.”³¹ It is among these masses, the tribal families, that the children are most likely to pursue government employment.

Among the Kuwaiti officers that I worked with in the Headquarters of the Land Force³² there was mixed English language proficiency, which made it difficult to communicate with critical officers. Specifically, within the Operations Department of the Land Force, the Chief Operations Officer spoke very little English and three of the six primary branch chiefs spoke no English.³³

A second important aspect of Arab identification is the historical organization of Arab societies. Arab societies have from the earliest times been characterized by social stratification. This stratification continues to exist today, although modernization has made it increasingly difficult to confine individuals to preconceived positions. Bates and Rassam point to the classical Bedouins of Arabia as an historic model of the modern Gulf States: “Bedouins recognized several distinct categories even within one tribal confederation. Among the camel herders, for example, one lineage was considered of superior descent and to possess an inherent claim to fill positions of leadership for the tribe as a whole. At the bottom of the scale were the blacksmiths who constituted a virtual caste.”³⁴ This stratification is seen as a natural social phenomenon, which is based on heritage, wealth, and power. To some, the justification for this

³¹ Bates and Rassam, 92

³² The Kuwait Armed Forces is made up of the Joint Headquarters, Kuwait Land Force, Kuwait Air Force, Kuwait Naval Force, Commando Brigade, and Reserve Force. The Kuwait Land Force is a division-sized organization that has both a Warfighting function and a service component function.

³³ The Operations Department is similar to a Division G-3 Section. The Chief Operations Officer is a brigadier general, he directs six primary branches headed by colonels: G-3 Organizations, G-3 Training, G-3 Operations, G-3 Plans, G-3 Air, and G-3 Chemical Operations.

³⁴ Bates and Rassam, 262-263

stratification may be found in the Holy Koran. During a discussion about Kuwaiti society with several close Kuwaiti friends, I asked how there could be great inequalities of wealth in such a wealthy country. One of the most instructive responses was that even in the stories of the Koran, Arab society was stratified with each level having their roles and responsibilities. Certain people were destined to be slaves, some to be soldiers, others to be the merchants, while still others were destined for leadership. To them the divisions of society were reflective of God's will. The effect of the Arab social experience on military effectiveness should not be underestimated, especially as it affects the officer-enlisted relationship.

The Influence of the Family

The Arab social experience shapes the general perceptions about how groups of people interact; but it is the family that dominates the behaviors, loyalties, practices, and beliefs of individuals within Arab society. Political Scientist Halim Barakat describes the family as “the basic unit of social organization in traditional and contemporary society,” further asserting that it is the family that “constitutes the dominant social institution through which persons and groups inherit religious, class, and cultural affiliations.”³⁵ Families in Arab society function as unbreakable networks into which one cannot be fully welcome except through birth and, to a lesser degree, marriage. As the basic unit of social organization, they are hierarchical, patriarchal, and come with significant elements of commitment and reciprocity. It is from within this environment that Arabs learn about the nature of personal relationships, personal priorities, responsibilities, and self-sacrifice. Family takes priority over all other temporal issues within Arab society. Work, business, and personal desires generally come after commitments to the family have been fulfilled. Because the influence of the family is so strong, Barakat contends

³⁵ Halim Barakat, “The Arab Family and the Challenge of Change” The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) [online] URL: http://arabworld.nitle.org/texts.php?module_id=8&reading_id=13&sequence=1

that, “Arab society, then, is the family generalized or enlarged, and the family is society in miniature.”³⁶

I was able to witness the powerful indoctrination of young male children into the customs and traditions of several tribal families in Kuwait. Typically, family and friends met several times a week in the home of one of the family notables, perhaps the father or an eldest son; the young sons of the family would be stationed around the home to give greetings, serve tea and coffee and to observe the proceedings. These boys were always attentive and rarely spoke except when spoken to by one of the guests or elder family members. On the rare occasion of bad behavior any one of the family members would scold the child, and if they were senior to the father of the child, might even announce their disapproval to the father. The children knew their roles and responsibilities very well through constant repetition and careful observation of the adults. I left Kuwait struck by the power of the family to inculcate a sense of respect, hierarchy, and responsibility within the family. I also know that several of the well-mannered sons, who I observed ritually serving tea and greeting family and the friends of their father, had very bad disciplinary records at school. I make this observation to shed light on the fact that in a modern society, many Arabs may tend to take their family responsibilities more seriously than other public responsibilities.

Even the Kuwaiti workday routine is structured to allow individuals to devote sufficient time to their families and other commitments outside of work, a fact which most advisors arrive unprepared for. The typical workday during the Kuwaiti training year begins at approximately 0730 and ends before 1400. Liberal prayer, meal, and coffee breaks punctuate each day. Despite the hours, units receive their orders, elements train, and coordination gets done, albeit at reduced

³⁶ Barakat, *The Arab Family and the Challenge of Change*

levels. Nothing an American advisor can do will ever change the workday routine of the Kuwait Armed Forces.

Two family traditions that affect every aspect of life in Arab society are patriarchy and hierarchy. These two elements pervade society and influence the behaviors of both seniors and juniors in their relationships. Both elements are indicative of the primacy of vertical relationships where there always exists a senior and a subordinate player. These relationships exist at every level of society from within families and military organizations to the way in which the Emir and citizens relate to one another. At the top of each personal relationship sits the male authority figure who, according to Halim Barakat, “expects respect and unquestioning compliance with his instructions. His position at the top of the pyramid of authority is based on the traditional division of labor, which has assigned him the role of breadwinner, or provider.”³⁷ He points out that this traditional relationship is changing so that mothers exert greater influence today than at any other previous time, but that the structure of the family remains patriarchal and hierarchal. Arab families are organized around the father and he exerts more influence in his family than in any other aspect of his life, and he can be expected to bring the same social organization into his other personal and professional relationships.

Perhaps the strongest visible demonstration of this patriarchy is in the way the Emir of Kuwait deals with his citizens. It is common to read in the newspapers the familial language with which the Emir addresses the citizens of Kuwait. He commonly refers to the citizens as his sons and daughters, just as Kuwaitis may refer to the Emir as their father, and this language reinforces an already strong bond between the ruler and the ruled. This feature of the relationship between the ruler and subjects is not unique to Kuwait. Halim Barakat goes even further by relating the relationship to religion, pointing out that in many Arab countries the rulers

³⁷ Barakat, *The Arab Family and the Challenge of Change*

are “cast in the image of the father, while the citizens are cast in the image of children. God, the father, and the ruler thus have many characteristics in common.”³⁸

In an environment where the father figure always dominates the relationships around him, it is easy to see how this arrangement would affect a military organization. The commander, just as the father and ruler, is cast in a father-figure role and has been conditioned to believe that orders flow down the chain-of-command and loyalty flows up. Norville De Atkine specifically wrote about the impact of this kind of centralized style of decision-making in Arab militaries. His description captures the expectations of many Arab commanders: “Decisions are made and delivered from on high, with very little lateral communication. They are not to be reinterpreted, amended, or modified in any way.”³⁹

Tribalism

Tribalism is an extension of the obligation to the family. The tribe in Arab culture exists as a grouping of patrilineal families related by common ancestry. To an outsider, the influence of tribal relationships can be very difficult to recognize because the relationships are not always characterized by a common family name. Tribal identity helps to give a particular population a sense of history and can help to establish their cultural standing within a larger group. Bates and Rassam describe tribalism as “virtually indistinguishable from what we would regard as cultural ethnicity in the United States, or any pluralistic society.”⁴⁰ Tribes can also be the basic unit for political participation, particularly within the Arabian Peninsula, since political interests and family interests are so closely linked. The term political tribalism was coined by Khaldoun Hasan al-Naqeeb in his famous book *Society and State in the Gulf and Arab Peninsula* to

³⁸ Barakat, *The Arab Family and the Challenge of Change*

³⁹ DeAtkine, Norvell, “Why Arabs Lose Wars”, *Middle East Quarterly*, December 1999 Vol 6, No 2, [online] URL: http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/AD_Issues/amdipl_17/articles/deatkine_arabs1.html

⁴⁰ Bates and Rassam, 268

describe the tension that often exists between private and public good.⁴¹ Illustrative of this tension, the Government of Kuwait has been accused of actively seeking the support of tribal elements because the assumption is that “tradition and religious prescriptions predispose Islamists [*tribal elements*] to respect the ruling family’s authority more than secularist opponents tend to.”⁴²

Very rarely is the impact of tribalism described as positive; rather it is described as an entrenched political mechanism that can be difficult to reconcile with modern and objective politics. Tribalism is not something that can be eradicated, because it exists at a much deeper level than that of a political label; it goes to the very heart of how Peninsula Arabs identify themselves. Tribes are “closely integrated into the government apparatus and are represented by the ruling elite.”⁴³ The fact is that tribalism can and does negatively affect the politics and the workplace because tribal rivalries have been noted to follow into political and public life, but it is impossible to prevent. Tribes may even be compared to political parties because of the influence they hold over their constituents and because of the way ruling regimes attempt to influence them. It is easy to understand the difficulty in reconciling tribal rivalries within a professional and hierarchical organization such as the military, which is supposed to operate for the common good of all citizens rather than for a small segment.

Personal Relationships

Politics at every level in the Middle East is a highly personalized affair. Numerous informal ties, coalitions, expectations of loyalty, shared decision-making, and the use of intermediaries characterizes this personalized approach. Because there are so many competing

⁴¹ Aarts, 231

⁴² Mary-Anne Tetreault. *Stories of Democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) online at <http://www.ciaonet.org/book/tetreault/ch01.html>. Author italics.

⁴³ Aarts, 226

influences on Arab behavior, several of which have been discussed above, this personalized approach serves to keep an individual connected to as many of the right people as is possible as a measure of security “which allows them to cope with prevailing uncertainties of all sorts.”⁴⁴ These multiple relationships have been described as the basic sinews of the social system.⁴⁵ This tends to be a very calculated and laborious endeavor since it is critical to demonstrate the sincerity of personal relationships through constant visits, discussions, and public appearances. This aspect of personal relationships may be misunderstood as needless, but Bates and Rassam point out that politicking “is often a mechanism for spreading information, influencing decision, and controlling behavior.”⁴⁶ Another aspect of this type of associative and personal politics is that Arabs often prefer consultative and group decision-making methods. Arab culture largely rejects initiative and unilateral action in favor of conservative, consultative, and loyal action. This consultative decision-making process is, by nature, slow and difficult to understand because of the numerous actors with various motives. For American military personnel, this may be one of the most difficult aspects of Arab social interactions to understand, but it is fundamental to appreciate the process in order to understand that decisions generally represent some form of compromise in order to maintain group unity.

Islam

No one should doubt that Islam animates, characterizes, and to some degree defines each individual in the Arab and wider Muslim World. Kuwait is no exception to this fact. My discussion about the impact of Islam on the Kuwaiti national character will be limited for several reasons. First, the subject is too complex for the scope of this work. Second, Kuwait’s unique

⁴⁴ Bates and Rassam, 242

⁴⁵ James A. Bill and Carl Leiden. *Politics and the Middle East, 2nd Edition*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co, 1984), p. 74

⁴⁶ Bates and Rassam, 244

blend of conservative and liberal society produces individuals whose adherence to the public and private tenets of Islam vary widely. And, finally as a non-Muslim I do not want to use Islam to incorrectly to explain complex features of a foreign society.

Every Muslim is part of the Umma, or community of believers of the Prophet Muhammad and this membership requires the observance of religious duty and faith in God. For Arabs, and specifically Arabs of the Gulf States, identification with the Umma is very strong. The origin of Islam on the Arabian Peninsula, and the region's historic isolation from the rest of the world are fundamental reasons that the regional interpretation of Islam is generally more conservative than in other parts of the Umma, such as the formerly Ottoman areas, Central Asia, India, and Indonesia.⁴⁷

To some extent, public and private life in Kuwait revolves around religious ritual. This religious duty comes before other aspects of life, including work. Islam's influence on individual Kuwaitis, however, is similar to religious influence on Americans; one can find Kuwaitis who range from the devout to the minimally observant, although it is rare to find a completely agnostic or irreligious Kuwaiti. Both the devout and minimally observant will pray together several times a day, although the devout will complete the five daily prayers whether in public or at home.⁴⁸ The devout exert considerable influence on those around them and serve to instill religious discipline on those who might otherwise stray. Within the Kuwait Armed Forces, one of the devout will generally lead daily prayers for his work section; this person may, or may not be, a senior officer. On special occasions, such as the visit of a senior officer or

⁴⁷ Bates and Rassam. 53

⁴⁸ Prayer is one of the pillars of Islam. To fulfill this religious duty, a Muslim is supposed to pray at the following times: Fajr (Pre-Dawn), Dhuhr (Noon), Asr (Afternoon), Maghreb (Sunset), and Eisha (Evening). In my observations of members of the Kuwait Armed Forces, the Noon prayer is almost always performed communally in the local Mosque, and the Noon and Sunset prayers are almost always performed together while in the field. It is customary for nearly all work to cease during these two times to allow for group prayer. Other prayers are generally performed at the discretion of the individual.

government official, I have witnessed the unit commander or his deputy lead the prayers for the visiting delegation.

Kuwaitis, as generally faithful Muslims, have abiding faith in God, which can border on fatalism. This faith pervades nearly every aspect of an individual's daily life and can be witnessed by the numerous references Kuwaitis make to God and to the importance of God's Will during routine conversation. Kuwaitis invoke God's Will as a way of reminding themselves of God's primacy in their lives and of His control over daily events. I make this point because the constant invocation of God's Will can be confusing and frustrating to a non-Muslim, and it is often misunderstood and misinterpreted. Unfortunately, many Americans are told that "En sha' Allah" or "God Willing" is a polite way of a Kuwaiti saying "No" without having to say it outright. It is important to keep in mind that it may, in fact, be an evasive answer designed to allow the Kuwaiti to be polite, but that it may also mean "Yes" because God means it to be such. Most likely, it is a common cultural idiom that comes from the individual's deep Muslim identification and reinforced by the faith that God routinely exerts His will over individuals.

Islam has a rich heritage and history with which all Kuwaitis are very familiar. Islam serves as a primary identification for Muslims, reinforces societal behavior, provides a means for cultural communication, and affects individuals at the conscious and subconscious levels. In short, Islam is interwoven into the lives of each Kuwaiti, although it may be present at different levels. There are risks and limits, however, to using Islam to understand a diverse and complex Kuwaiti society. Oil wealth and modernization are two elements which exist in contrast to the conservative effects of religion in Kuwaiti society.

Modernization and Wealth

It is impossible not to notice Kuwait's national wealth when visiting Kuwait. The signs of affluence are everywhere: luxury automobiles, massive palaces, yachts, and high-end consumer items. It is equally obvious that it is relatively new wealth. Within the site of the original settlement of Kuwait City, there exist primitive mud and stone buildings, which were the bulk of the construction up until the mid-1940s. The discovery of oil in 1936 and subsequent exploitation for world markets in the 1940s transformed Kuwait from a primitive desert trading post into a modern metropolis in less than 50 years. This rapid economic expansion has enabled a similar population expansion of both Kuwaiti citizens and non-Kuwaiti workers: "Until the mid-1950s Kuwait, for instance had a population of around 35,000 with the main industry being the seasonally active pearl fisheries. Only with oil did this Gulf city emerge as one of the largest urban centers of the region; today Kuwait has a population of about 1 million."⁴⁹ July 2004 estimates place the population at more than 2.2 million, of which nearly 1.3 million, or 57%, are non-Kuwaiti citizens.⁵⁰

Oil exploitation also provided the al-Sabah dynasty with the vast economic resources that it has used to create a modern state with a distributive economic system. Kuwait, from its origin, has followed the traditional distributive economic model, rather than a traditional authoritarian one, such as exists in Saudi Arabia.⁵¹ The distribution of large portions of the national wealth among the citizens remains one of the keys to Kuwait's stability. Kuwait's wealth has made it possible to guarantee housing, medical coverage, education, business opportunities, personal freedoms, and most importantly employment for its citizens. All of this has been done without having to exact great contributions of labor and effort from its citizens.

⁴⁹ Bates and Rassam. 165

⁵⁰ <http://worldfacts.us/Kuwait.htm>

⁵¹ Bill and Leiden. 31

Kuwait has not been immune to the problems associated with the rapid explosion of wealth. Two negative aspects of rapid modernization and wealth are the reliance on non-Kuwaiti labor and under-employment. Along with these negative aspects of development stands an element of potential positive change: the emergence of a modern middle class.

One of the most striking elements of family life in Kuwait is the presence of non-Kuwaiti household servants within nearly every Kuwaiti family, regardless of economic standing. Kuwaitis rely on foreign laborers within the household to do nearly all of the domestic work. Foreign laborers, often from South Asia or North Africa, are employed as cooks, drivers, nannies, cleaners, shepherds, and other unskilled jobs. It is not uncommon for a single family to employ four or more domestic servants. The result is that Kuwaitis are raised in an environment where they are required to do very little, if any, manual labor within the home. They consequently bring these expectations with them into the workplace, which represents a significant hurdle when it comes to socializing young Kuwaiti soldiers into the Army. For their entire lifetimes, neither their family nor their government has asked a great deal in the way of physical labor or sacrifice from them, so that with the transition into the Army, where individual effort and commitment to national objectives are key to successful soldiering, they may run into significant difficulties. Being a soldier in a Gulf State like Kuwait “challenges the social contract, which to various degrees, rests on the provision of benefits to citizens, not the extraction of resources from them.”⁵²

The pervasive reliance on domestic servants does not end at the front gate of the military base either; every military organization employs numerous non-Kuwaitis to do the cleaning, cooking, and service tasks. While in garrison, civilian contract employees do the bulk of the manual labor. When deployed to the field, an entire service brigade of Bangladeshi soldiers

⁵² Herzog. 245.

conducts the bulk of the menial tasks for the Kuwait Armed Forces.⁵³ The other major source of non-Kuwaiti personnel in the Kuwait Armed Forces are the thousands of Bedu soldiers Kuwait continues to employ in the ranks. After the military disaster of the Iraqi invasion, Kuwait has endeavored to reduce its reliance on these Bedu soldiers, but has had mixed success. According to one well-informed Kuwaiti source, “Although their [Bedu] real numbers at the moment is a guarded secret, it is estimated to be approximately 40% of about 16,000, which is the total estimated number of army personnel.”⁵⁴ The majority of these Bedu soldiers serve in the Kuwait Land Forces because they lack the qualifications and are not authorized to serve in positions that have access to sensitive military technology. The motivations of these non-Kuwaiti soldiers to serve are generally economic; they possess much lower levels of education, and are believed to have little to no incentive to fight for Kuwait. This factor continues to hold back the development of professionalism.

To be certain, Kuwait recognizes the problem of over reliance on foreign labor. Parliament has passed numerous laws since 1992 designed to minimize imported labor, but has had difficulty in enforcing them.⁵⁵ The fact is that many young Kuwaitis do not need to work in order to make a living. Paul Aarts estimates that disguised unemployment is as high as 20 to 40%,⁵⁶ which means that many Kuwaitis have nominal jobs to satisfy Kuwaiti legal requirements but are not required to attend those jobs, while others may be paid from family enterprises also without having to actually work. Other results of the push to include more Kuwaitis in the job

⁵³ An entire Bangladeshi brigade of loan-service soldiers such as doctors, explosive ordnance disposal technicians, barbers, cooks, drivers, mess attendants, carpenters, and electricians is employed by the Kuwait Armed Forces. A Bangladeshi Colonel commands the brigade and each soldier and officer is paid one salary by Bangladesh and a separate salary by the State of Kuwait. The soldiers wear the emblem of the State of Kuwait and are expected to fight in the event of conflict. Since the 1991 liberation of Kuwait, these Bangladeshi soldiers and Bedu soldiers are the only non-Kuwaiti soldiers in the Kuwait Armed Forces.

⁵⁴ Al-Najjar. 6

⁵⁵ Tetreault.

⁵⁶ Aarts. 225

market have been to increase the numbers of government employees without increasing the scope of their work. A trip to a public ministry office can quickly demonstrate that there are more employees than there is work. Likewise, within the Kuwait Land Force, the impact can be seen in the numbers of newly commissioned officers during 2004, when over thirty-Second Lieutenants were assigned to various Kuwait Land Force Headquarters assignments upon their graduation from the Military Academy because there were no openings for assignments within the brigades.⁵⁷

Massive oil wealth has also created a strong segment of society that is accustomed to and, or dependent on government assistance, social welfare, services, and employment guarantees. The stability bought by oil wealth comes at the price of the under development of Kuwait's military human resources and professionalism. More so than any other factor, oil wealth and the public welfare environment stifle individual initiative and development, which so badly cripples their ability to promote change in Kuwait's military professionalism.

Cultural Impacts on The Military Effectiveness of the Kuwait Armed Forces

It is critical for any Western military professional who will have contact with the Kuwait Armed Forces to recognize the reality of the force, readjust his expectations, and learn to work within the constraints. In order to evaluate the negative impact of culture on the military effectiveness of the Kuwait Armed Forces this paper will briefly examine the following key areas: command and control (C2), leadership, manpower practices, and training.

Command and Control

⁵⁷ This example is noted from the author's experience and conversations with a number of these lieutenants. Some of the lieutenants were assigned as drivers for senior officers, others were assigned as junior aides, others were assigned to a staff section within the Headquarters. Most believed it would be a temporary assignment of up to one year before they were either sent to an occupational specialty school or to a unit.

Command and Control (C2) within the Kuwait Armed Forces reflects the social stratification, and the hierarchical and patriarchal structure of civil society. C2 is extremely rigid and centralized, and offers very little freedom of action for subordinates. Kuwaiti C2 can best be described as a highly centralized, top-down process, which uses detailed vice mission orders to control subordinates.

The focus of C2 within the Kuwait Armed Force is the Chief-of-Staff, who exercises detailed control over each of his components. The role of the Chief-of-Staff cannot be underestimated because his influence extends far into the realm of what would be considered the service component's responsibility in the United States. He derives this central position through a combination of factors such as being hand-selected by the Minister of Defense, the small size of the Kuwait Armed Forces, and the cultural tendency towards hierarchy and vertical relations. A corollary effect of his influence is the high concentration of talented and connected personnel assigned to the Kuwait Joint Headquarters (KJHQ) Staff. Only the best and brightest officers, most of whom are bilingual in English and Arabic, are assigned to the KJHQ.

The centralization of C2 within the Kuwait Armed Forces ensures that the KJHQ is the only organization within the Kuwait Armed Forces that exercises true command. In practice, the Chief-of-Staff routinely exercises command over and within each of the components of the Kuwait Armed Forces, with the component headquarters frequently reluctant to act without the explicit orders, authorizations, and guidance from the Chief-of-Staff, or his principal staff representatives.

Exercise AL-BAREQ (FLAG) 2004 offers an insight into the nature of C2 within the Kuwait Armed Forces.⁵⁸ The Kuwait Land Force received an exercise order from the KJHQ,

⁵⁸ Exercise AL BAREQ 2004 was a unilateral Kuwait Armed Forces exercise held in March 2004 involving each of the components with the KJHQ exercising overall command. The scenario was the land-air-sea defense of Kuwait

which tasked specific maneuver brigades with conducting position and area defenses in Northern Kuwait. The orders were so specific as to permit the Current Operations Officer of the Kuwait Land Force to be able to reissue the order to the maneuver brigades within hours of receiving the order. When unit positions were plotted on maps, it was clear that several routes and battle positions were located in the heart of the Udairi Range Impact Area, and other positions were located inside American expeditionary camps.⁵⁹ The Commander of the Land Force directed his units to proceed with their maneuvers although this exposed his forces to the dangers of unexploded ordnance and live-ranges, rather than modifying the plan and reporting the results to the KJHQ. To the credit of the Commander of the affected armored brigade, he quietly redirected his forces to move out of the dangerous locations to a more suitable position from which he could continue the exercise. This action, too demonstrates the delicate nature of C2 within the Kuwait Armed Forces. The Land Force Commander could not betray the orders of his Chief-of-Staff and the Maneuver Brigade Commander could not take overt action that would result in the embarrassment of the Land Force Commander. Each officer took the actions that allowed him to stay and fight another day. Within the Kuwait Armed Forces it is clear that orders and directions are expected to flow down the chain-of-command and precise execution and loyalty is expected to flow up the chain-of-command.

Paradoxically, while detailed command is the norm in the Kuwait Armed Forces, it does not follow that detailed control and supervision is used. Control, characterized by, “collecting, processing, displaying, storing, and disseminating relevant information for creating the common

followed by land counter-attacks to restore the international borders of Kuwait. It was a major achievement as the exercise was planned and conducted with very little assistance from American and British advisors. The exercise was a combination of field exercises, command post exercises, and a combined arms firepower demonstration.

⁵⁹ Udairi Range is the live-fire range complex in Kuwait. During the period of Exercise AL BAREQ 2004, it was being heavily used by US forces conducting training prior to going to Iraq. The range supports all ground delivered ordnance and some aviation ordnance. Several pre-deployment and post-deployment expeditionary camps are in close proximity to the range complex.

operational picture, and using information during the operations process,” is not a focus of the normal Kuwaiti military battle rhythm.⁶⁰ The details of military operations are largely left up to the subordinates because of the expectation of explicit adherence to orders.

Leadership

Leadership is the essence of military effectiveness in the United States military where every individual, regardless of rank, is encouraged to act in the interest of unit goals and expected to ensure the welfare of those individuals under his charge. The very idea of leadership within the Kuwait Armed Forces is radically different from what American military personnel understand it to be, which is not difficult to understand in light of the Arab tendency towards acquiescence to those in governmental, family, or tribal leadership positions in their society.

Within the Kuwait Armed Forces, leadership is not viewed as a responsibility, but as a reward for good and faithful service. Leadership entails privileges, and it is the province of officers, specifically commanders. This occurs as a result of cultural tendencies and the detailed command style of the organization stemming from, “a highly accentuated class system, and lack of a non-commissioned-officer development program.”⁶¹

The class system is emblematic of the larger stratification of Kuwaiti society. The results are that there is very little valuable interaction between officers and soldiers in the Kuwait Armed Forces. Soldiers within the Kuwait Armed Forces are taught technical skills, but leadership development is only now beginning to be addressed.⁶² One of the starkest differences between the American and Kuwaiti approach to leadership is the notion of leadership privilege.

⁶⁰ FM 6-10. 1-15

⁶¹ Norvell B. De Atkine, “Why Arabs Lose Wars” 4

⁶² During 2004, both the Commander of the Land Force Institute and the Commander of the Military Education Department identified the need and desire to begin sending Kuwaiti soldiers to the US Army’s Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC) and follow-on Non-Commissioned Officer courses. To date, all enlisted training for Kuwaiti soldiers has been focused on technical maintenance schools to support their American combat systems.

Kuwaiti officers generally eat first, and separately from the soldiers both in the garrison and while in the field. Many Kuwaiti officers have enlisted drivers whose only job is to serve as orderlies and errand runners. These soldiers often hold the highest enlisted rank and follow an officer throughout many years of service doing nothing but menial tasks.

Junior, and mid-grade, officers often fill jobs which are done by soldiers in the American military. Part of this reflects a cultural bias towards individuals with higher social standings, while it also reflects the reality that many soldiers do not have the education and competency to succeed in challenging assignments. Kuwait's armored forces are a good example of this problem. All of Kuwait's M1A2 Tank Master Gunners, and most of the tank commanders, are officers, even though the program has been running for over ten years. The resources exist to train junior personnel, but the will and trust to do so do not.

A comparison of brigade commanders within the Kuwait Land Force demonstrates the great power that a commander can exercise over his unit, related to the vertical nature of personal relationships and the power of father figure within Arab cultures, as discussed earlier. The brigade commander occupies such a position within the Kuwait Land Force. He runs his own camp, geographically separated from his headquarters, and has the ultimate say about all tactical matters in his brigade. He is an individual with sufficient personal clout and professional reputation to have been assigned a very prestigious job and is largely allowed to operate with very little oversight. His seniority insulates him from the prying eyes of staff officers of the Land Force staff, and his peer group operates more like a support network than a group of peer competitors. The positive aspect of this type of freedom is that it allows the strongest brigade commanders to flourish and to drive their units to succeed. The negative aspect of this, however, is that the political nature of assignments does not guarantee that the most competent officers are

assigned to these critical billets. Fortunately for the Land Force, the majority of the brigade commanders were among the most professional officers in the Land Force, who knew how to get the best out of their soldiers, equipment, and resources. The role of the commander, as an individual, in the Kuwait Armed Forces is vastly more important than it is in the American Armed Forces because of how closely Kuwaiti units mirror their commanders. The impact a single commander can have in the Kuwait Armed Forces is likely to be much greater than any one American officer would exert on his unit because of all of the invisible cultural factors that connect Kuwaiti soldiers.

Manpower Practices

The Kuwait Armed Forces suffer from a host of manpower-related deficiencies to include an inefficient recruiting system, a small manpower pool from which to draw recruits and officers, structural imbalances that favor combat systems over the ability to sustain those systems, and a highly politicized system of promotions and assignments. Though manpower problems affect each component differently, they all suffer from similar problems.

Among the components of the Kuwait Armed Forces, the Air Force and Navy generally attract the highest-quality recruits because of the greater opportunities for high-tech training and the better working conditions. Kuwait's extreme climate makes indoor work much more attractive to the prospective Kuwaiti recruit who has been accustomed to an indoor life during the five to six months of Kuwait's extreme heat. Families compete and try to arrange deals to ensure that their sons are able to get the military assignments that conform to their notions of appropriate prestige and opportunity. The majority of talented and ambitious Kuwaiti recruits and young officers gravitate to the Kuwait National Guard, Navy or Air Force where they will have a greater opportunity for such prestige. Moreover, many of these recruits and officers are

given the opportunity to receive both English language training and military training in the United States.⁶³ My research does not indicate that there is any mechanism to ensure that each component receives its fair share of the qualified applicants. The Kuwait Land Force (KLF) suffers the most from this factor, as it remains somewhat of a last resort for many under-educated recruits and Bedu soldiers who are able to make it into the Kuwait Armed Forces, but cannot otherwise qualify for technical military jobs.

A significant imbalance exists between personnel assigned to headquarters and combat arms positions and personnel assigned to logistics and maintenance positions. The priority given to headquarters and combat arms assignments is a reflection of their perceived greater prestige and importance. These priorities also manifest themselves in the quality and quantity of logistics equipment that is purchased and fielded to support the combat units, which perpetuates the chronic logistical problems and reliance on foreign contractor support to maintain advanced systems.

An example of the under-resourcing of Air Force logistics highlights the problems, which are endemic in all of the Kuwaiti components. France employs 95,000 logistics and support personnel to support a fleet of 545 combat aircraft, which is a ratio of 174 support personnel for each combat aircraft.⁶⁴ Germany employs 93,000 personnel to support 439 combat aircraft, a ratio of 211 personnel for each aircraft.⁶⁵ Kuwait's entire Air Force, on the contrary, has a total of 2,600 personnel for 93 combat aircraft.⁶⁶ Thus, Kuwait's ratio of personnel, including pilots, to support each aircraft is only 27:1. This calculation does not take into consideration the

⁶³ The Kuwait Air Force sends the largest number of enlisted soldiers to the United States for technical military training in support of the F-18 program. The Kuwait Land Force sends very few enlisted soldiers for overseas training because their training can be handled by the Kuwait Land Force Institute in Kuwait.

⁶⁴ Herzog, 244

⁶⁵ Herzog, 244

⁶⁶ <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/worldaf/kuwait.html>

planned acquisition of American Apache attack helicopters during 2005, which could reduce this ratio even further to an unbelievably low 23:1. As a result, Kuwait is able to continue operating its fleet of aircraft only through the heavy use of foreign defense contractors.⁶⁷

Training

From the liberation of Kuwait until the beginning of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, the Kuwait Armed Forces had one principle that guided all military training and preparation: be ready to delay any subsequent Iraqi invasion in order to enable Coalition Forces to conduct a counter attack to reestablish the international border. From this daunting mission, the Kuwait Armed Forces drew its tasks. It is clear that Kuwait understood that its forces must be ready to deploy at short notice with combat-ready formations capable of using all elements of national military power if they were to sufficiently delay the Iraqi Army. Despite the real danger that existed during this period, training in the Kuwait Armed Forces remained inadequate for the task. Fortunately for Kuwait, it was never seriously tested by Iraq. Developing an understanding of how and why the Kuwait Armed Forces trains as it does is key to understanding its current capabilities. As a close observer of Kuwaiti training, I believe that the overall training focus and objectives are adequate but that the amount, scope, and difficulty of training are inadequate to result in significant improvements.

A good starting point from which to examine training is the typical annual training cycle. A typical Kuwaiti training year begins during late-September to the first of October and generally concludes by the first of June. The Kuwait Armed Forces consider the period between June and September as too hot to conduct routine training, which reduces the available time for

⁶⁷ Within the Kuwait Air Force alone, there are foreign firms from Australia, France, and the United States doing maintenance and supply chain management.

training to just over eight months.⁶⁸ Within the eight available training months, there are many other events, which reduce the available time even further. The first major obstacle to training is the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, during which all training stops. The two major Eid holidays result in an additional training loss of nearly two weeks.⁶⁹ One more training week is lost because of the celebration of Kuwait's National Day and Liberation Day. The result of these training pauses is that the actual Kuwaiti training year lasts just over six-months.

"Once trained, always trained" reflects a common belief about training among many Kuwaiti officers. Whereas Americans believe that many individual, unit, and collective tasks must be rehearsed many times to achieve proficiency, a similar belief does not exist among the majority of Kuwaiti officers. An example of this training mindset is that armored and mechanized battalions in the Kuwait Land Force conduct gunnery training only one-time per year. Gunnery training generally lasts two to three-weeks per battalion with very little opportunity for remedial training or additional training later in the year. Part of this problem is caused by the simple competition for scarce range resources during a compressed training year.⁷⁰ Soldiers and officers alike have come to expect this annual tempo and considerable resistance to multiple gunnery exercises would be likely if attempts were made to spend more time at training.

⁶⁸ Training is not prohibited during this period, although it is rare. The Kuwait Land Force has conducted bilateral training with different MEU(SOC) units during the summer months at a reduced level. American forces routinely conduct military training during these months in Kuwait although it is generally more difficult due to increased requirements for ice, water, and medical attention. Summer high temperatures in Kuwait are generally 110-130 degrees Fahrenheit. Humidity is generally very low, but is punctuated with several periods of high humidity, especially during late summer.

⁶⁹ Eid al-Fitr falls at the end of the Ramadan holiday. The Ramadan-Eid training pause generally lasts 31 to 34 days depending on regular weekends. Eid al-Adha, also referred to as the Second Eid, generally lasts four days and is celebrated in conjunction with a regular weekend. Very little training generally occurs before the Second Eid due to increased family responsibilities and preparations for Eid. Because there is a difference in the Islamic and Gregorian calendars the dates of Ramadan shift about 10-days each year. Ramadan will fall in the summer months beginning about 2009.

⁷⁰ The KLF possesses two modern ranges for their M1A2 Main Battle Tanks and Desert Warrior Mechanized Vehicles. When each of these 10 battalions is allotted its range time it equals 25-27 weeks out of an available average of 26-28 weeks. The M-84 Yugoslavian Tanks and BMPs cannot use the modern ranges because they do not possess training ammunition.

A “Once trained, always trained” philosophy also results in many basic combat skills going untrained on an annual basis, such as individual weapons, chemical defense, crew-served weapons, and fire-support. Training to tasks multiple times, on multiple occasions is culturally difficult for Kuwaitis because, to them, it represents an implicit attack on their proficiency and capability. A Kuwaiti soldier or officer who has successfully completed a gunnery cycle believes deeply that he has proven himself and his competence and that there is no reason to reaffirm it until the following training cycle.

Unit training also suffers from a lack of imagination, variety, and difficulty because conducting realistic and challenging training involves accepting the risk that the training unit may fail to meet command expectations. Training which is routine and well understood allows units to claim that they have completed their tasks in a successful manner, thereby avoiding the likely shame and embarrassment of a failed exercise. Unit exercises are likely to be held in the same training areas year-after-year, using identical tactical scenarios. This fact ensures that units are likely to succeed at their training and it reduces the amount of preparation required to go on exercise. Kuwaiti artillery units are particularly prone to this type of training, although armored and mechanized units suffer from the same tendency. Annual artillery training takes place at the same exact gun positions and on the same exact targets as the year before, despite almost no restrictions on where units can train. These exercises give an appearance of smooth functioning and effective military training, although in reality they fail to be challenging and mask problems that might otherwise surface. Because training is generally conducted at the Brigade and lower, there is very little oversight or pressure from higher headquarters to drive change.

Agents of Change: The Emerging Professional Military Middle Class

One element of great potential change is the emergence of a modern, professional middle class that has the education, skills, and competence to help propel a state like Kuwait forward into self-sufficiency. Modernization and wealth have opened the world to Kuwaitis, and many of the best and brightest in Kuwaiti society for at least a generation have been leaving Kuwait for university educations in the West, as “Many members of the new class seek to advance themselves through professional skills and talents rather than through the use of wealth and personal connections.”⁷¹ This is particularly true of the merchant class in Kuwait, who are the most likely to seek overseas higher education in an attempt to strengthen their business prospects. Another important and rapidly developing sector of the professional middle class exists in the junior and mid-grade officers of the Kuwait Armed Forces. Many of these officers have come from modest families outside the extreme wealth and privilege of Kuwait, and have found similar opportunities for individual intellectual development through overseas military training. These military officers understand that one of the keys to personal development and advancement within the Armed Forces rests in learning English so that they can go to the United States or United Kingdom for professional courses. Officers who are selected for these courses generally serve in important billets and are able to count on greater career advancement than their peers who do not speak English and who do not have advanced Western military educations. Graduates from these courses are also more likely to return abroad later in their careers for follow-on education.

The Kuwait Armed Forces invest heavily in American military education for both officer and enlisted personnel, and the current education account is an estimated \$40 million for two

⁷¹ Bill and Leiden, 122

years.⁷² Although the overall numbers of Kuwaiti officer students attending courses in the United States has declined slightly since 2001, between 100-120 officers have still been sent annually to American military courses. This pool of Kuwaiti officers sent on courses always includes a significant number of members of the royal family and officers from other notable families. The Kuwait Land Forces are also increasing their reliance on the United Kingdom to produce junior officers and are experimenting with Non-commissioned officer development courses as well.⁷³

When several factors are considered, the impact of this cadre of Western-educated Kuwaiti military personnel has the potential to be significant. First, sending Kuwaiti personnel to Western military schools has only been occurring at significant levels since 1993, which means that the majority of these officer students would be only at the Lieutenant Colonel to Brigadier General rank. It will take a full generation, perhaps between 2020-2030, for the first students who would have attended American MOS-producing schools as Second Lieutenants to reach the pinnacle of the military hierarchy, and it will not be until then that the real impact of this program can be known. At that point, the Kuwait Armed Forces will have achieved a thorough distribution of American and British trained officers serving in all the officer ranks. Second, although many students come from the ruling family or other elite families, there are a significant percentage of students who come from modest and tribal families. Although these

⁷² Major Frank Virgadamo, USAF, <virgadamo@omcku.centcom.mil> "SCD Questions", 29 Dec 04, personal e-mail (29 Dec 04). Maj Virgadamo is the Training Branch Director, Security Cooperation Directorate of OMC-K. The account is renewed on an as-required basis rather than for a specific time period. The current account is expected to fund officer and enlisted education for the next 1-2 years, at which time it would be renewed. Enlisted education is primarily for technical courses related to maintenance, logistics, and computer-related courses. Efforts are underway to include basic leadership and NCO leadership development courses for Kuwaiti enlisted personnel. Officer education includes MOS-producing courses from the Army, Navy, and Air Force, as well as Career, Intermediate, and Top Level Schools.

⁷³ Project Subhan is the Kuwait Land Force's test program that will send upwards of 30 lieutenants annually to Military Occupational Specialty (MOS)-producing schools in the United Kingdom during the 2003-2006 period. Project Mubarak is a similar plan for Kuwaiti NCOs. The American effort to send Kuwaiti officers and NCOs to American military schools is managed by the Training Branch of the Security Cooperation Directorate in OMC-K.

officers may never achieve positions at the policy-making level, they are likely to achieve significant rank and responsibilities within the Kuwait Armed Forces. Among the officers of modest backgrounds the pay, benefits, and political connections available to senior officers will likely continue to secure their loyalty to the system that restricts elite military positions for royal family members and their closest allies. Finally, when the number of students is considered in relation to the small size of the Kuwait Armed Forces and overall population it represents an important and potentially influential segment of the military.

The importance is that this element of potential change exists in Kuwait and other Arab states and that care should be taken to nurture and further the opportunities for engagement, exchange, and education of this growing and dynamic class of Arabs.

Conclusions About Cultural Factors

It would be difficult to exaggerate the impact that cultural factors have on the military effectiveness of the Kuwait Armed Forces. Arab identity, family and personal relations, oil wealth, and Islam all have major impacts on the Kuwait Armed Forces because they shape the stratification of Kuwaiti society, they value group loyalty over individual responsibility, and they rely on family ties and hierarchy rather than impersonal organizations to define social interaction. Kuwaiti culture is thus fundamentally different from American culture, and neither can be adequately understood if examined only in comparison. There is no universal standard against which military effectiveness can be measured, which means that true understanding of Kuwaiti military effectiveness can only be achieved when it is examined in its own environment.

Cultural factors can help define who the Kuwait Armed Forces personnel are and how they act, but they fail to adequately tell the entire story. Culture fails to account for the impact of the missions and tasks assigned to it by the government and the expectations that the government

has for its Armed Forces. Understanding the design and logic of Kuwaiti National Security Strategy is central to gaining an appreciation of the Kuwait Armed Forces. The Kuwait Armed Forces is, after all, a product of its environment. To understand the Kuwait Armed Forces one must understand the medium within which it operates. Just as all armies execute the policies of their leaders, so too does the Kuwait Armed Forces. It would be hard to imagine that the Kuwait Armed Forces could operate outside the guidelines set by their national leadership. To only examine Kuwait's military performance is to put the cart before the horse.

The following section of this paper will provide an analysis of how the Government of Kuwait sees the Kuwait Armed Forces, and how the latter fits into the overall design of Kuwait's national security.

Kuwait's National Security Structure

The ruling family of Kuwait has made the conscious national security decision to pursue Kuwait's security through diplomacy, military alliances, and various other security arrangements, rather than through a credible and organic national defense. This decision is based on the recognition of Kuwait's position of relative weakness in relation to its neighbors. The Government of Kuwait strives to maintain public support for such a cooperative national security policy through open and visible support for their numerous international military partners. In addition the widespread support for such policies indicates general public agreement that it is better to counter external threats through diplomacy and military alliances than it is with their own military forces.⁷⁴ The humiliation of the 1990 Iraqi invasion has ensured that this security-policy decision is popular among the general public despite the fact it seriously undermines the military effectiveness of their Armed Forces by lowering public expectations of the Kuwait Armed Forces, and the reducing the requirement for Kuwait to provide for its own defense.

⁷⁴ Al-Najjar, 23

Kuwait's national security structure is organized to deal with a composite of domestic, regional, and international situations. The core of the decision-making authority within the national security structure resides in the Prime Minister (PM), who is assisted by the Council of Ministers, Supreme Council of Defense (SCD), and the National Security Council (NSC).⁷⁵ The ruling Sabah family tightly controls this structure, and the membership of each of these organizations is nearly identical.⁷⁶ There are very few outsiders represented, and the actions of these groups lack substantial transparency, which may be a source of resentment within the Kuwait Armed Forces.⁷⁷ Although the Emir of Kuwait separated the position of Crown Prince from that of the Prime Minister in July 2003, Shaikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah continues to occupy both posts. The decision-making hierarchy is relatively insulated from Parliamentary pressure, controls the bulk of all of defense and security-related spending, and directly controls the Armed Forces, Police, and National Guard. The Sabah family has controlled this structure by also maintaining its grip on many of the key ministries such as foreign affairs, defense, finance, oil, and interior. The Prime Minister is exceptionally powerful within this organization and has direct influence on all assignment of all senior officials. He can also direct policy to the leaders of the Armed Forces, police, and National Guard, working primarily through the Ministers of Defense and Interior and the President of the National Guard to implement these policies. The Minister of Defense, in turn, controls the Armed Forces, and

⁷⁵ Figure 1 is an organization chart of the key components of Kuwait's national security structure. Professor Ghanim Al-Najjar's article "Challenges of Security Sector Governance in Kuwait" gives an excellent account of the organization of this structure. Most importantly regarding the policy-makers in Kuwait, the Prime Minister, Council of Ministers, Supreme Council of Defense, and National Security Council, is that the ruling Sabah family tightly controls these bodies through the office of the Prime Minister. The Ministers of Defense and Interior are both from the ruling family and they influence and direct policy well down the chains-of-command of the Armed Forces and Police. They have the responsibility to select, appoint, and change subordinate leaders within these organizations.

⁷⁶ The membership of the Supreme Council for Defense includes the PM, FORMIN, FINMIN, etc; the membership of the NSC includes the PM, FORMIN, FINMIN, MINCABAFF

⁷⁷ Al-Najjar, 23. According to Al-Najjar, "It is widely believed within the security apparatus that appointments to the top offices lack transparency, which causes a high degree of dissatisfaction among many high-ranking officers."

the Minister of the Interior controls the police forces, although they both fall under the direction of the Supreme Council of Defense and the National Security Council. Both are increasingly becoming subject to Parliamentary interest and oversight.

Kuwait has cultivated two separate military organizations to reflect its multidimensional threats. The Kuwait Armed Forces is organized and trained for external threats although its capabilities would allow them to participate in internal defense, as well. The Ministry of Defense tightly controls the operations of the Kuwait Armed Forces, which implies an element of parliamentary control. The Kuwait National Guard, on the other hand, remains independent of any Ministry and gets its direction directly from the SCD. The KNG was created during the build-up to the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Kuwait sent a sizeable military contingent to fight on the Arab side during the war and the KNG was given the mission to remain at home. Its creation reflects the perception of a serious internal threat, and the requirement to retain a force that can be committed without the approval of parliament. Unlike the Kuwait Armed Forces and police, the KNG is made up 100% of Kuwaiti citizens who are allowed to participate fully in the political process with full voting rights.

Kuwaiti National Security Strategy

Kuwait's small size, lack of strategic depth, and geographic isolation have combined to blur the distinction between its survival interests and its vital interests, as a serious challenge to Kuwait's vital interests could seriously threaten its very existence. In response to the Iraqi invasion and continued threats to its existence, Kuwait has adopted a pragmatic approach to protect these interests. Kuwait's survival interest is, first, retaining Sabah hold on power; second, preserving the sovereignty of Kuwait; and third, the freedom to exploit its oil resources. Closely associated with these survival interests, are two vital interests, which are maintaining

Kuwait's regional standing, and maintaining internal stability. Paradoxically, these interests have discouraged Kuwait from undertaking serious steps to improve the capabilities of the Armed Forces.

Survival Interests

First and foremost among the principles of Kuwait's national security strategy is maintaining the al-Sabah hold on power. It is safe to assume that Kuwait would continue to exist as a nation even if the current dynasty lost power, but the country would exhibit so different a character that it would have to be considered entirely new. The government of Kuwait is organized to ensure that the ruling family retains the ability to dictate policy. The ruling family completely dominates the national security hierarchy, which allows it to control the country's massive defense spending. This structure ensures the royal family's near-total control over the defense budget and hence allows the Sabah family to dictate which families receive the large commissions from defense contracts.⁷⁸ The control over the defense budget ensures the politicization of defense and security decisions by tying the award of contracts to political loyalty. A relatively large armed force is also a significant source of employment. The armed forces is equipped with everything from the most modern combat aircraft and naval vessels all the way to the least technical equipment, allowing the government to provide adequate employment for all segments of the society, which is critical, since Kuwait's population is expected to double between 1995 and 2020.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Every foreign company doing business in Kuwait prior to mid-2004 was required to have a Kuwaiti agent. This meant that every defense contractor who was providing goods and services to Kuwait was required to operate through a Kuwaiti company, which would be paid a significant commission on all sales. Different families within Kuwait represent different companies and because Kuwait is one of the world's largest arms importers, annual commissions are a significant source of income. Distributing these commissions is one method of spreading the wealth in order to maintain internal stability.

⁷⁹ Herzog, 256.

Kuwait's second survival interest is the preservation of its sovereignty. Kuwait has made the decision to pursue this end through security agreements with multiple outside powers, both regional and international. These outside powers are primarily, but not exclusively, the United States and the other permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Kuwait also actively engages with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) because it understands its place in the community of Arab nations is crucial to internal and regional stability.

These multilateral defense agreements complicate further Kuwait's attempts to improve its military effectiveness because of the political requirement to use defense acquisitions as a means of maintaining political loyalty.

"Kuwait does not believe they (sic) have enough strategic depth to be successful with their own forces so they have to rely on outside powers, but they don't want to be beholden to any one member. The Kuwaitis understand that credibility requires an international coalition and they have to have P5 support," explains former United States Ambassador to Kuwait, Richard Jones.⁸⁰ This principle above all others shapes the quality and condition of the Kuwait Armed Forces because of the procurement practices that have been adopted to support this principle. Kuwait's policy of pursuing multiple security arrangements reflects a conscious decision to "minimize the risk to Kuwait by diversifying their relationships."⁸¹ The primary means which Kuwait has chosen to solidify these relationships is through the purchase of foreign military hardware from the nations, which, "played roles in supporting Kuwait's liberation either politically or militarily."⁸² Since the liberation, Kuwait has ranked within the top ten arms importers in the world.⁸³ The result of these expenditures has been that the Kuwait Armed

⁸⁰ Jones interview.

⁸¹ Jones interview.

⁸² Al-Najjar, 7

⁸³ World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, US Government Printing Office, 1996

Forces, Police, and National Guard has been rebuilt with military equipment from “Australia, Norway, Belgium, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Jordan, China, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States,”⁸⁴ which demonstrates that Kuwait has chosen international support over the creation of an effective and interoperable military force.⁸⁵

It is obvious that a military force pieced together with equipment from a dozen different nations will suffer from great technical interoperability problems and a lack of system compatibility. Although viewed by many observers as a bizarre procurement practice, it may be seen as rational and appropriate from the viewpoint of the Kuwait policy makers. It is critical to understand that the best hope for Kuwait’s defense rests with its international relationships, not with its own forces. “The military,” as Ambassador Jones points out, “fulfills other semi-important tasks such as employment,” and military spending allows the ruling family to, “spread the wealth around to insure internal support.”⁸⁶ Although it may seem irrational and inefficient to have cobbled together an advanced military force that cannot fully function together, the Kuwaiti policy makers understand their difficult position and have consciously chosen to forgo the potential to develop their own forces in favor of maintaining the strategic relationships that should prevent the armed forces from ever having to be employed to defeat an external threat.

Vital Interests

Kuwait’s history has been characterized by the constant balancing of factions within the country in order to maintain stability. The maintenance of this stability both internal to Kuwait and regionally is of vital importance to Kuwait.

⁸⁴ Al-Najjar, 7

⁸⁵ Figure 2 gives an example from the Kuwait Land Force of the results of the military procurement policies. Just among the main combat systems in the KLF are systems from the United States, Great Britain, Russia, and China.

⁸⁶ Jones interview

Kuwait's policy of relying upon outside and Western powers for its national security is not without risk, as it is widely recognized that Arab states that pursue similar policies "invite domestic political pressure and criticism from other Arab and Muslim states."⁸⁷ In order for Kuwait to balance these internal and international pressures, Kuwait also maintains very close political, military, and economic ties with the GCC.⁸⁸ Kuwait is a major contributor to the Peninsula Shield Force and an active participant in GCC political activities.⁸⁹ This regional commitment also helps to protect Kuwait from being over-identified with the United States and its other non-Arab partners. In order to maintain its regional standing, Kuwait is forced to take action to avoid being seen as overly obedient to the United States and its other partners. This is a critical factor for American military personnel to understand because Kuwaiti policy is established based on a host of internal, regional, and international factors that do not generally coincide with military logic, and may at times seem to contradict it. Again, the central point of Kuwaiti national security strategy is to rely on relationships to assure their security.

Of equal importance to Kuwait is the maintenance of internal stability both among the wealthy merchant class and the tribal families, which has produced an environment where it is essential for the ruling family to maintain the status quo with all sectors of its citizens.⁹⁰ This

⁸⁷ Herzog, 239.

⁸⁸ Kuwait has been beholden to many of the Arab states since they backed Kuwait against Iraq at the time of Kuwait's independence in 1961. The Arab states also backed Kuwait's bid to join the United Nations against the desires of the USSR. Kuwait demonstrated its commitment to the Arab cause by sending forces to participate in the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli Wars. It further demonstrated its support to the GCC in 2002. Kuwait hosted the Peninsula Shield Force in Western Kuwait prior to the commencement of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. The Peninsula Shield Force deployed to support Kuwait in maintaining the security of their border with Iraq. These displays of Arab solidarity are also important as demonstrations of Kuwait's independence from any one of its most powerful Western allies.

⁸⁹ Peninsula Shield Force is the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) military force made up by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, and Oman. Its function is to be a deployable military force for the collective security of the GCC states. Kuwait currently contributes an armored or mechanized battalion to the Peninsula Shield Force, which is stationed in King Khalid Military City in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

⁹⁰ Former Ambassador Richard Jones explained the Kuwaiti desire to maintain a balance among the different classes of Kuwaitis as a "conscious effort to always balance everyone by the Sabah family, so that no one is too upset. It

status quo stifles military efficiency at both the strategic and tactical level by creating two classes of citizens equally accustomed to reaping great personal benefit from the military. The merchant families reap great financial benefit as agents for foreign defense firms have no reason to provide a logically-equipped force, while the tribal families have no incentive to develop military professionalism in an environment where individuals are not promoted based on capability and performance, but based on relationships.

The status quo for Kuwait's Armed Forces damages its attempts to develop its military effectiveness in many ways. First, as was discussed in the section about cultural factors, there is no "well-developed concept of citizenship or of public responsibility to the state,"⁹¹ in Kuwait. Employment in the military is a public right, not a duty in Kuwait. This largely stems from the constitutional work guarantees, which all Kuwaitis are afforded.⁹² The unfortunate result of this system is that especially within the public sector, jobs are viewed as a kind of social welfare system.⁹³ This system has been deliberately created in order to ensure the satisfaction of the Kuwaiti populace and is in keeping with the tradition "of the social contract in the GCC states which, to various degrees, rests upon the provision of benefits to citizens, not the extraction of resources from them."⁹⁴ Clearly an employment system that is founded upon resisting change and which runs contrary to the development of human resources is difficult for most Americans to understand. For it to make sense, it must be examined through the lens of a Kuwaiti policy

stems back to the original social contract. It also reflects the traditional Arab desire for consensus and shared decision making."

⁹¹ Aarts, 231

⁹² Constitution of the State of Kuwait available online: <http://www.kuwait-info.com/sidepages/cont.asp> Article 41 of Kuwait's constitution states, "Every Kuwaiti has the right to work and choose the type of his work. The State shall endeavor to make work available to citizens and to make its terms equitable."

⁹³ Tetreault, Chapter 7. Tetreault explains the negative effect of these legal protections on worker discipline and development in the Kuwait Petroleum Company. Her observations can generally be applied to any public sector job in Kuwait. The legal protections, short work days, and less than demanding work conditions have created a complacent workplace environment within all areas of Kuwait's public sector.

⁹⁴ Herzog, 245. Footnoted in the reference from F. Gregory Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States*, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994), p.123.

maker. To the Kuwaiti policy maker or military leader, a satisfied and therefore supportive population is the most critical factor in preventing internal instability, even if this system of work guarantees provides very little incentive to professionalize their forces.

Those Kuwaiti officers who attempt to work against this inefficient system in favor of individual responsibility and accountability often find their actions to be undermined by personal interventions, political influence, or established manpower practices. The Kuwait Armed Forces does not have an up-or-out policy that continually assures that the most disruptive personnel are separated from the service for non-performance. The result is that the Kuwait Armed Forces retain many personnel on unit rolls who cannot and do not contribute to the accomplishment of the unit mission. The personalized style of politics also interferes with enforcing discipline on soldiers. On several occasions, the author witnessed family members, government officials, and other military officers petition unit commanders on behalf of one of their relations regarding matters that Americans would consider the sole purview of a unit commander. Cultural considerations and the requirement to maintain good relationships within Kuwaiti society force many commanders to capitulate to these petitions rather than to stand on the principle of individual accountability. The negative impact on military discipline cannot be understated. The system clearly favors subordinates over their supervisors and encourages these supervisors to make allowances rather than to stand on principles, which are not likely to survive if a subordinate pursues his claim to the next higher level.⁹⁵

Achieving popular satisfaction with the status quo is among Kuwait's most vital requirements. Stability is the currency that enables the Sabah family to retain its grip on power within Kuwait. The government buys internal stability and popular support by shielding soldiers

⁹⁵ Mary-Ann Tetreault offers an exceptional analysis of the Kuwaiti workplace environment and its effect on the supervisor-subordinate relationship. Her study focused on the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, but her examples are consistent with the environment the author found in the Kuwait Armed Forces.

from individual responsibility and paying them generous wages without asking for much work in return. The government also buys their external security through an aggressive program of international engagement underwritten by massive arms acquisitions that ensure that they will always be able to garner sufficient international support to prevent a future invasion, such as occurred in 1990.

Conclusions Chapter: Principles to Guide an Advisors Actions

Detailed accounts of Arab armies and their performance in war exist for those readers interested in developing an historical understanding of how Arabs fight and prepare to fight.⁹⁶ Doubtless these accounts are very important and insightful, but they may inadvertently lead a reader towards the simple conclusion that all Arab armies are inept and that they cannot change. Although these accounts provide a solid link between military history and Arab culture, and are excellent starting points for the study of any Arab army and how culture impacts it, without further study there may be at risk of drawing over-simplified conclusions and developing dangerous stereotypes. The historical evidence of Arab military inefficiency and ineptitude cannot be refuted, but it should be only one part of our understanding of the region and its people. The converse, and one can argue, the more important key to understanding and working with Arab armies is that of accepting the cultural complexities and learning how to deal effectively with them. We must not allow history to blind us or prevent us from developing appropriate means of dealing with both our Arab allies and enemies. A more effective and complete study of Arab armies should seek, first, to understand the complex reality of Arab culture and, second, should identify those principles and techniques which will lead to better communication and cooperation with them.

⁹⁶ Arabs at War and Why Arabs Lose Wars are two of the best accounts.

Use Arabic: If You Don't Speak Arabic, Learn Arabic

An unfortunate byproduct of the United States' geographic isolation is that the vast majority of our citizens have very little detailed understanding of foreign countries and speak only English. This fact is little different among armed forces personnel who are being called upon with increasing regularity to interact with Arab soldiers and civilians. Based on the author's experience as a typical American officer assigned to advisor duty with the Kuwait Armed Forces, most Americans are unprepared to contribute to furthering the critical military-to-military relationship between the United States and Kuwait, and by extension, it is likely also true with other Gulf militaries. .

The first and most obvious way in which most Americans are unprepared for duty in Kuwait is language. The expense and time needed to learn a language preclude all but our foreign area officers and language specialists from going to language school. My experience with the Kuwait Land Force is that only a small percentage of the force speaks even some English, and even among officers only perhaps 30-50% are able to do so effectively. The percentage of officers who speak English fluently is much smaller. This means that an American advisor can deal effectively with only a small number of Kuwaitis, which can lead to a variety of misunderstandings.

Although most American advisors do not speak Arabic when they arrive in Kuwait, there are great opportunities to learn and use Arabic during their tours. Kuwaitis identify very closely to their language and are happy to help the outsider learn Arabic. For several reasons it is essential that every American advisor use as much Arabic as his ability allows. The mere demonstration of the desire to learn some basic Arabic is seen positively by Kuwaitis, and if every American advisor uses Arabic this will contribute to a wider perception among Kuwaitis

that Americans respect Arabs. If some advisors use Arabic and others do not, it contributes to a mixed message about Americans and hence American motives. Moreover, the use of Arabic, specifically the Kuwaiti dialect, breaks down barriers to communication and makes it more likely that a Kuwaiti will treat an advisor like a friend. As T.E. Lawrence reminds us, “learn all you can about your Ashraf and Bedu...Get to speak their dialect of Arabic, not yours.”⁹⁷ Finally, using Arabic is a key to developing relationships with those Kuwaitis who do not speak English. Using even basic Arabic enables an advisor to access the cultural subconscious of Kuwaitis by helping to develop bonds that will in turn lead to even greater cultural understanding and awareness.

Do Not Rush In: Relationships Always Have Deeper Meaning, Find Out What It Is

Most American advisors tend to gravitate towards those Kuwaiti officers who speak English well and form a comfort zone with just a small number of Kuwaitis. However, the best and most influential Kuwaiti officers are not always those who speak English, which is a fact that can be hard to appreciate, since we are inescapably drawn to those with whom we can best communicate.

I experienced this first hand as I developed a particularly close relationship with one Operations Officer in the Land Force Headquarters. This officer was a graduate of the US Army Command and General Staff College and spoke exceptional English. His English skills made him a very important asset to the Commander and the Operations Officer of the Land Force. My tendency was to spend more time with this officer than the Operations Officer because of the ease of communication. However, the result of this close association was that other Kuwaiti officers began to associate me too closely with this officer, which created friction and jealousies among the staff that I was not aware of I had been in Kuwait for more than a year. As I

⁹⁷ Lawrence, Article 2

cultivated other relationships, it became clear that I had been focusing my effort on the wrong person. I had undermined my own position with the other officers by being overly identified with a single key subordinate, thereby unintentionally elevating his stature through our close association.

Your Role is With the Commander

T.E. Lawrence wrote clearly about where the focus of the advisor should be when he said it should be with the Commander: “In matters of business deal only with the commander of the army, column, or party in which you serve. Never give orders to anyone at all, and reserve your directions or advice for the C.O., however great the temptation (for efficiency's sake) of dealing with his underlings. Your place is advisory, and your advice is due to the commander alone.”⁹⁸ He further cautioned that advisors must “be shy of too close relations with the subordinates of the expedition. Continual intercourse with them will make it impossible for you to avoid going behind or beyond the instructions that the Arab C.O. has given them on your advice.”⁹⁹ This also applies to the Kuwaiti system, which works altogether differently than our own, and it is critical to understand and work within the Kuwaiti system to be successful. This requires the advisor to resist the temptation to find particularly American solutions to Kuwaiti problems, such as working with a very talented subordinate to solve a problem without having first discussed it at least casually with the commander. The degree of centralization in the Kuwait Armed Forces cannot be underestimated, as commanders have arrived to their positions for specific reasons. Therefore, the advisor must work hard to be accepted by the commander first. Only then should other relationships be pursued in depth.

Control Your Expectations, Be Realistic

⁹⁸ Lawrence, Article 3

⁹⁹ Lawrence, Article 5

Another way that American advisors are unprepared for duty advising Kuwaitis is in their expectations. I, as most American advisors do, arrived in Kuwait with the expectation that I would be able to affect some positive changes in the Kuwait Armed Forces because I had been told there was so much room for improvement. In retrospect, I arrived in Kuwait bringing unrealistic expectations stemming from my American military experience. Although every advisor can and should expect to make some progress during a tour, it is important that an advisor understands that he is part of a process that can only be truly measured in the very long term. Short-term goals, while important, can contribute greatly to frustration and disillusionment if an advisor does not understand the long-term importance of his presence and relationship building. Patience and persistence will encourage advisors to continue to work towards the very long-term goals of helping the Kuwaitis create a self-sufficient, professional armed force. In order for the process to work, it must be a Kuwaiti process and Kuwaitis must change it by themselves from within their system.

A deeper understanding of how people work in Kuwait will reveal that much work is accomplished outside of the workplace in diwania.

Diwania, Diwania, Diwania

The relaxed work ethic of the Kuwait Armed Forces belies its own efficiency because as much, or more, work is done outside of the workplace in diwania.¹⁰⁰ A deeper understanding of how people work in Kuwait will reveal that much work is accomplished outside of the workplace in diwania. The diwania and other informal associations are the hidden efficiency in Kuwait.

¹⁰⁰ The word diwania can be used both as a noun and a verb. A diwania is a room in a house, in which the male family members and friends meet in order to meet and talk. The act of diwania is the routine visitation with friends and family that serves as a time for the exchange of ideas, reinforcement of friendships, and petitioning more powerful individuals for their support on a variety of issues. The diwanias of Kuwait serve as networks for the rapid dissemination of information. The diwania is recognized as private space, into which government regulation does not intrude. Diwania is therefore the most effective place or means for Kuwaitis to exchange ideas; it even includes the freedom to criticize the government.

American advisors should actively seek the opportunities to be invited to participate in diwania outside of work hours. Kuwaitis do not distinguish between work at the office and work in the diwania—neither should Americans. Kuwaiti officers frequently associate with their classmates from the Military Academy to discuss work, family, politics, and other items. Influential Kuwaitis often host diwania on a regular basis, which allows for the continual exchange of ideas and information. Diwania serves to spread important information, build coalitions, and to assess the support or resistance to specific policies and programs.

There is no better manner in which to observe Kuwaiti culture and tradition than in diwania. It is so crucial to the interaction of Kuwaiti society that I believe it should be a mandatory part of every American advisor's duty. Not only is it the best place to observe Kuwaitis interact with one another, it is among the best ways to begin to understand the networks of associations that are key to determining who is most influential in those associations. An advisor can expand his personal and professional relationships and cultural understanding through routine attendance at diwania.

OMC-K Should Serve as a Culture Lab to Develop Required Cultural Skills

One of the most critical tasks the American military faces in the Global War on Terror is to develop an understanding of Arab, and other, cultures that will be useful in planning and executing military operations. The Office of Military Cooperation, Kuwait (OMC-K) can and should function as a cultural learning lab for developing leaders who can understand and work with other Arab allies and fight Arab enemies. Personnel concluding tours as advisors in Kuwait have gained considerable regional experience that should be called upon with follow-on tours with operating force units and other advisory groups. American advisors should be encouraged

to put their observations into writing and to develop cultural briefs that should be given to American units that conduct bilateral training and meetings with the Kuwait Armed Forces.

One way that OMC-K can benefit itself, individual advisors, and the uniformed services is by educating all its personnel about the region, the people, and the culture. Arab cultural and language skills are at a premium and operating forces around the world require professional military personnel who possess an understanding of our Arab allies and enemies. Professional Military Education (PME) should be routine at OMC-K, to take advantage of being in country and in the region.

PME necessarily also needs to be incorporated in OMC-K in order to share corporate knowledge and expertise as well as to bring new advisors up to speed quickly regarding cultural norms that will help them to become more effective advisors. PME should strive to pass on lessons from advisor to advisor so that hard-learned lessons are not lost. Another benefit of PME is that we are investing in our own personnel, equipping them with the skills that they can apply in the future in the Global War on Terrorism.

Increase Personnel Stability for Greater Effectiveness

OMC-K should also reevaluate its personnel policy in order to establish greater personnel stability within some critical billets. The highly personalized system of relationships in Kuwait makes it desirable to increase tour lengths to two years for some of the more senior positions. Those advisors who frequently engage with the Kuwaiti Joint Staff are among the most critical positions that would benefit by increased tour lengths. It must also be recognized that key Kuwaiti leaders may frequently change billets, which may require shifting American advisors positions in order to maintain continuity.

One-year tours damage American credibility in the eyes of the Kuwaitis, as the latter believe it is an indication that we merely pay lip service to our commitment to the relationship. Increasing certain key positions to two-year tour lengths is a minor change that could impact our effectiveness with the Kuwait Armed Forces significantly, especially if it is incorporated with an improved understanding of the Kuwait Armed Forces.

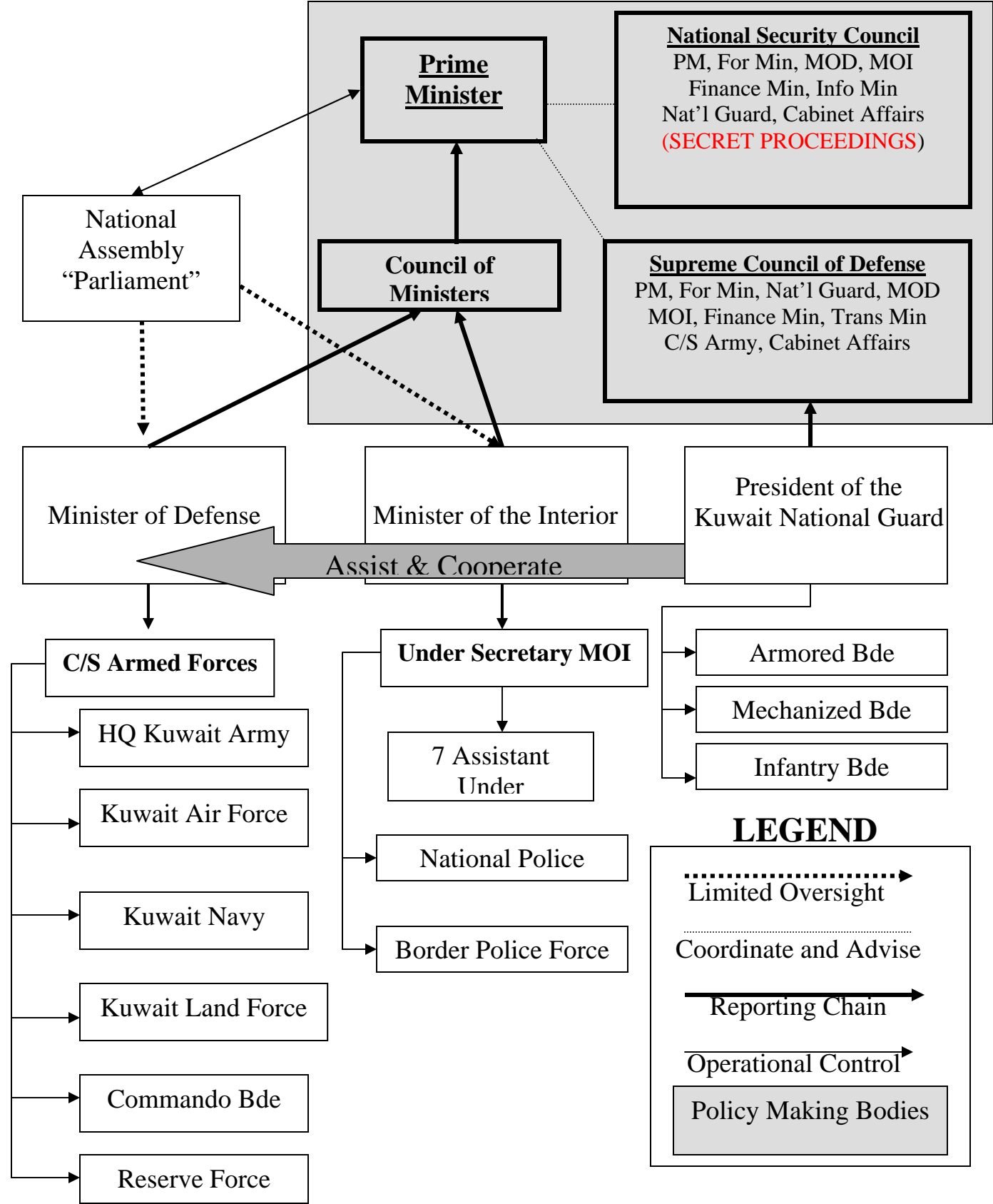
Conversely, tour extensions for reasons other than greater effectiveness of professional and personal relationships hurt the effort. For example, extensions for personnel who are not interested in developing a deeper understanding of Kuwaiti civil and military culture hurt the overall effort. Among many advisors there are generally two groups of people: one that is very engaged in the Kuwaiti culture, and the second that is wrapped up in the expatriate subculture of Kuwait. In my experience, the second group represented a significant proportion of the whole and provided very little to the collective understanding of the Kuwait Armed Forces. Such individuals should be considered a corrosive element to the advisory effort and efforts should be taken to remove them in order to avoid undermining the overall effectiveness of the mission.

Square Pegs, Round Holes

Success in advising the Kuwait Armed Forces requires that we, as Americans, recognize the radically different nature of our two forces without becoming frustrated, cynical, sarcastic, or angry about the difference. The Kuwait Armed Forces are not capable or desirous of becoming a carbon copy of the US Armed Forces, and we should be very mindful of this. We should stop trying to fit their square peg, into our round hole.

Figure 1: Kuwait's National Security Apparatus

Kuwait's National Security Apparatus



NOTE: As discerned by the author from his experience and from Professor Ghanim Al-Najjar's article "Challenges of Security Sector Governance in Kuwait", Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Working Paper—No 142, Geneva, August 2004

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